Sir Thomas Henry Martyn Jerram was a significant figure in Anglo-Japanese relations mainly by virtue of his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the China Station shortly before the outbreak of the First World War. He had earlier experience of East Asia on the China Station as a commander on HMS Northampton (1894–96) and as captain of the battleship, HMS Albion (1902–04). Following two years as commander of HMS Ruby, he was described as a first-class executive officer and in April 1894, was also recommended for promotion by his C-in-C, Vice-Admiral Fremantle. In July 1903, on his departure from China, he was described by Rear-Admiral Grenfell as ‘a very first-class officer in every way’, a view in which Vice-Admiral Bridge, the C-in-C, China Station, concurred but added the caveat: ‘thinks shows too great readiness to give in to the opinions of subordinates.’

The official record does not indicate what Jerram as a subordinate thought of Bridge, who served as C-in-C in the period when the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was first made. However, among Jerram’s
surviving private correspondence at this period is a letter to his brother, Charles, dated 21 August 1902:

I shall be mighty grateful when my year on this Station is up and I sincerely trust that there will be no hostilities of any sort while I am here, for I should have no confidence whatever, nor would any single captain on this Station, in Admiral Bridge’s dispositions. It is really a scandal that he should be in command.  

Bridge assumed that he would be the allied commander-in-chief in the event of war with Russia and France, but even after he received instructions warning him that such an appointment would not be acceptable to the Japanese side, he persisted in pursuing joint Anglo-Japanese operations. Captain Troubridge, the British naval attaché in Japan, considered these operations as irrelevant to Japanese strategic calculations. But it was not until after real choices were made in actual combat and Bridge had returned home that the Admiralty agreed with Troubridge that ‘many of the theoretical proposals put forward about co-operation with the Japanese were now seen to be impracticable.’ This was amply confirmed by General Sir Ian Hamilton in conversation with Navy Minister Yamamoto Gonbei:

We hope and believe we shall have to make no call on England even to look warlike until the peace negotiations at the close of hostilities, when others again may try to play the part of fire thieves.

Bridge’s successor, Sir Gerard Noel, described by Lord Walter Kerr as ‘stubborn as a mule’, rejected Admiralty advice to delegate the conduct of any operations at sea to a second-in-command with experience of operating individual battleships and battleship squadrons. When Noel was instructed to form a combined Eastern Fleet through a concentration of the East Indies, Australia and China Squadrons at Singapore, he still had smaller forces available to him than those available to the Japanese Combined Fleet when it overwhelmed the Russian Baltic Fleet at Tsushima in May 1905.

Jerram was already well-qualified in the handling of battleships when he returned home in 1903 and was transferred to the Channel Fleet. The Admiralty congratulated him on the handling of HMS Russell and on his report on fleet manoeuvres in December 1904. At the end of his service there in December 1905, Sir Arthur Wilson described him as ‘an excellent officer with good judgement and knowledge of the service.’ In 1909, Jerram attended the War and Signals Courses for senior officers and subsequently joined the Mediterranean Fleet, where he invited Prince Fushimi Hiroyasu on